

The Myth of the Persecuted Jews in the USSR

BY WARREN J. KELLER

ED. NOTE: The author has just returned from a visit to Moscow and Leningrad where he gathered information for the following article.

ONCE AGAIN the spectre of anti-semitism has been raised in reference to the treatment and condition of Jews in the Soviet Union. Just prior to the writer's departure for Moscow, the Western press was full of news about the Leningrad hi-jack trials in which two Jews were given death sentences and nine other Jews were given extensive jail sentences for their attempted high-jacking of a Soviet Aeroflot airplane bound for Stockholm. The open implications of these press reports were that Jews are being persecuted in Russia merely because they are Jews and not because they have committed criminal actions.

These press reports have led Jewish leaders in the West to talk as if the Jewish population in Russia is faced with extermination.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing remotely similar to Hitler's racist policies is being carried out in the Soviet Union today. What has developed in the Soviet Union is a complex phenomenon with two distinct types of Jews: The assimilated Jews and the nationalist Jews.

Among those one would consider as being among those assimilated Jews would be such persons as David Oistrakh, the violinist, Maya Plisetskaya, the premiere ballerina of the Bolshoi Ballet, numerous members of the Polit-

buro and the Supreme Soviet, and hundreds of thousands of ordinary Jews who find their way of life most consonant with life in general in the U.S.S.R. As a matter of fact, it would appear that the communist way of life would, indeed be impossible without the strong intellectual background of its Jews. Moscow, with a population of 500,000 Jews, is most hospitable to Jews as witness the four large, active synagogues in that city.

The author had an opportunity to visit the Central Synagogue in Moscow and was quite surprised to see a well-attended service going on as well as a meeting of Hassidic scholars studying the Torah and praying in an ante-room of this same synagogue. This sight certainly did not impress one as being a preview of genocidal annihilation as implied by the Western press. In addition to this freedom to practice his religion, a Soviet Jew, unlike his forefathers under the czars, is not subject to special legislation or official discrimination because his domestic identity card says he is a Jew and not a Russian, a Ukrainian or a member of some other nationality. Assimilated Jews make up a majority of Soviet Jews of which there are three and one-half million. They are generally left alone by the authorities. Anti-semitism is a legal crime in the Soviet Union. In such cities as Moscow, Jews live well and hold good jobs. The existence of a Yiddish journal, dozens of books on Jewish subjects in Yiddish, a touring Yiddish theatre—all of these facts give the lie to the accusation of "persecution."

Among the nationalist Jews one would include people like those Jews involved in the Leningrad high-jacking, and violently pro-Zionist Jews who want desperately to emigrate to Israel as well as those relatively few Jews who want to subvert every aspect of Soviet life to "jewishness" which is a manifestation of their desire not to assimilate. The official policy of the Soviet Union is to oppose the emigration of these people but not on the grounds that the U.S.S.R. is anti-Zionist, *per se*. In fact the Soviet Union firmly believes in the right of Israel to exist but is dead set against any expansionist Israeli policy which threatens to further upset the balance of power in the Middle East therefore jeopardizing Soviet-Arab relations.

One can only conclude from these facts that there is only one motive for the Western press' distortion of events: To whip up pro-Israeli sentiment to pacify the Jewish electorate in the West, and to give justification for involvement (particularly American involvement) in

a military and economic way on the side of Israel in any future conflicts with the United Arab Republic.

It is particularly disheartening to see that some so-called "conservatives" in this country, as well as the Western press in general, are hewing to the Israeli propaganda line. One such "conservative," a popular Fundamentalist Christian preacher, has been indulging the rationale that it is "God's will" and fulfills Biblical prophecy that Israel be victorious in any war with the Arabs, and that America, in particular, must bend every effort of will, energy, money, war materiel and even our own men to guarantee that victory. As the old adage has it, "With 'friends' like these, who needs enemies."

Postscript: As this article goes to press, it has been revealed that the death sentences in the Leningrad high-jacking have been commuted to 15 years in prison. This as a result of the pressure of "world opinion."

An Appraisal of George Washington

Washington gives to American annals and institutions their chief historic grandeur. His genius was impressed on the organic formation of the republic, and his spirit and principles are its highest political and moral power. In a modest republic it was providentially ordained that he who was its founder and father should be a model character, worthy of universal imitation. Washington is that model. Like a finished and faultless piece of painting, the more his life is studied the more he will be admired and the brighter will his virtues shine. He is one of the few men whose fame and influence constitute the common inheritance of the race and will live through all time. The impersonation of every great and true virtue, he gathers around him the affections of the good and commands the admiration of the world.

—B. F. MORRIS in *Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States*, published in 1864.